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Distinction Paper

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Combining Forces

Throughout my dance studies at Ohio State, I developed a special interest in combining dance with other forms of visual media. My distinction project, Combining Forces, was a choreographic dance study uniting human movement and video projection. It was a collaborative effort between choreographer Salim Gauwloos and myself, and took form throughout the duration of the school year. The idea of the project emerged from witnessing dance department faculty members and peers incorporate dance and media. I became interested in their processes and wanted to explore the different possibilities of combining visual art forms. The project went through several periods of development and evaluation. I discovered a variety of possibilities and was faced with many challenges when attempting to combine movement and video projection. Combining Forces focused on studying attention and integration, and how these topics relate to media in performance.

Salim Gauwloos choreographed the movement for the project. Gauwloos is a dance choreographer residing in New York City. He began his dance training in Belgium at the Ballet of Flanders in Antwerp. At the age of seventeen, Gauwloos was awarded a dance scholarship by Steps Dance School and moved to the United States to continue his training. He was hired by Madonna in 1990 and worked with her on several projects including the Blonde Ambition Tour, the documentary film "Truth or Dare", and several music videos. He has performed on Broadway in "Aida" and "Mambo King, The Workshop". His choreography has won several awards including a "Gypsy of the Year 2003" for his choreography of Aida's performance at

Equity Fights Aids. He continues to teach at Broadway Dance Center and choreograph for Orlando Ballet Company and Houston Ballet Company (The Real Slam, Biography).

I was first introduced to Gauwloos while interning at Broadway Dance Center in New York City. I took his class twice a week during the ten-week summer internship. During that time, I became familiar with his approach to choreography. Gauwloos' movement vocabulary combines aesthetics from various forms of modern, ballet, and jazz techniques, all of which complement my training and personal approach to movement. I enjoyed the range and seamless integration of the techniques he used in his class combinations, and thought he would be a nice fit to the vision of my project. I contacted Gauwloos in September to create the choreography and worked out details for the rehearsals. We arranged for the rehearsals to take place during the week of December 10, 2007. Throughout the planning process, I explained to Gauwloos my intention to incorporate video projection with his movement. He was open to exploring the idea with his choreography and looked forward to the collaboration process.

During my stay in New York City, I met with Gauwloos each day for two hours at PMT Dance Studio on West 14th Street. I also spent time throughout the week researching dance, exploring the city, and taking dance classes.

The schedule for the week of December 10, 2007 went as follows:

Monday

10:00 AM: Arrive in New York City
4:00 PM: Rehearsal with Salim Gauwloos at PMT Dance Studio
7:30 PM: Rhapsody's Hip Hop Class at Broadway Dance Center
9:00 PM: Derek Mitchell's Jazz Class at Broadway Dance Center

Tuesday

10:00 AM: Visit Central Park
1:30 PM: Gauwloos's Contemporary Class at Broadway Dance Center
4:00 PM: Rehearsal with Gauwloos at PMT Dance Studio

Wednesday

10:00 AM: Visit NYC Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center
2:00 PM: Rehearsal with Gauwloos at PMT Dance Studio
6:00 PM: Tour Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre at The Joan Weill Center for Dance
8:00 PM: Visit Times Square

Thursday

12:00 PM: Dorit Koppel's Ballet Class at Broadway Dance Center
1:30 PM: Gauwloos' Contemporary Class at Broadway Dance Center
4:00 PM: Rehearsal with Gauwloos at PMT Dance Studio
8:00 PM: Attend the musical, *The Color Purple*, at The Broadway Theatre
10:30 PM: Visit Rockefeller Center

Friday

10:30 AM: Judy Rice's Ballet Class at Broadway Dance Center
1:00 PM: Visit Saint Patrick's Cathedral
4:00 PM: Rehearsal with Gauwloos at PMT Dance Studio
7:30PM: Michelle Barber's Jazz Class at Broadway Dance Center
10:00 PM: Video Shoot

Saturday

10:00 AM: Leave New York City

The week was a well-rounded series of events, which let me experience dance from many different angles throughout the city.

The main focus of the trip was the daily rehearsals with Gauwloos. His personal approach to teaching was detailed and specific. He incorporated different technical aesthetics and qualities within his choreography. Gauwloos created moments of weighted release associated with the maneuvering of the pelvis. He also generated surprise moments with articulate leg gestures related to classical ballet lines. I enjoyed the fusion of dance forms within the choreography. It made the material challenging to perform. Throughout the rehearsal process, Gauwloos questioned how I could enhance the quality of the movement through video

imaging and set up the video to not distract from the clarity of the movement. I kept Gauwloos' idea of the relationship between the movement and video in mind throughout my weekly rehearsals with dance department faculty member Vera Blaine.

Blaine reviewed the details of the body's weight. She worked with me to identify the weight shifts and patterns. In doing so, the body created clear lines and shapes in space. In another rehearsal, Blaine and I worked on establishing clear spatial patterns. The spatial arrangement defined the pattern for the movement, which would help me to organize the video design to not distract from its quality and clarity. By identifying the qualities in the movement and setting up precise spatial patterns, I felt would have an organized starting point for the video development.

I acquired the video footage during the final evening of my stay in New York City. I noticed the streetlights on the newly wet sidewalks, crowds of people walking, and cars traveling rapidly across the streets through the dark night. After stopping to take in the environment for several minutes, I thought that this setting could serve as a design element in the project's video. I began shooting. As I held the camera loosely in my hand, I began walking at a steady pace down the street. I allowed the people passing by to come in and out of the camera frame as they entered and exited my surroundings. I then proceeded to do a still shot while standing on a sidewalk in the middle of the street. The camera captured the cars passing. I then zoomed the camera to focus on a distant street sign and pulled back wide again to reveal the traveling cars. I proceeded to cross the street and noticed a jagged metal fence lining the sidewalk. I started to shoot, panning the fence capturing the texture and the water droplets left behind from evening rain. Lastly, my camera made its way to a pile of fallen leaves on the sidewalk. I held the camera at a bird's eye view above the leaves and began shooting straight downward.

My original thought regarding the video design was to combine concrete and abstract images. I felt the video footage from New York City would serve as the concrete images for the video treatment. However, I also wanted to create an abstract image to incorporate in the design. To begin the editing process, I transferred the video footage on to my computer using the software program Final Cut Pro. I started to play with the filter effects to develop the abstract image. I took the still shot of the leaves from the ground and applied several effects. I first applied posterize, which turned the leaves colors from orange and yellow to shades of gray. I then applied offset, bloom, and slit scan to transform the leaves into a distorted arrangement of gray lights projecting outward from the middle of the screen. After I created the image, I was faced with the challenge of how to successfully integrate the two types of imaging with the movement.

I used a storyboard approach to begin designing the video. I separated my ideas into six sections to complement the entrance, four sections of movement, and exit. After each movement phrase, a change would occur in the video. The movement from Gauwloos' choreography inspired several sections for the video. Throughout his choreography there was a sense of intertwining distorted isolations and classical ballet lines. The mixture of the abstract and concrete images was the way in which I wanted to portray Gauwloos' choreography through the video design.

The first viewing of the movement with the video projection was well received by my peers. They felt the incorporation of the video brought a new meaning to the movement. Ashley Mathus, a classmate, suggested I work on developing the character that was forming through the relationship between the movement and the video. Other classmates agreed that a narrative story line was beginning to form.

Blaine helped me to construct a narrative between the video and choreography. She also assisted in establishing eye focus throughout the movement. The defined story line and focus aided in integrating a relationship between the choreography and the video. However, these additions took away from some details in the original choreography. Specific movements were deleted, while others were enhanced. I was not bothered by the changes in the choreography. I felt that the changes were necessary in order to achieve success for the project.

I made several discoveries during the movement and video development. I was establishing a pattern for the audience's focus, through the set up of the video design and the spatial arrangement of the movement. The attention was beginning to crystallize and have a clear arrangement in space and time. The video went through many editing sessions to achieve successful moments.

The first section of the video started with five images appearing one by one on the screen arranged in an asymmetrical format. The images varied in size and had to be edited to fit properly on the projection surface. The images were cropped and resized to accomplish the effect. The timing of the appearance of the images was also important to the structure of the video. The third image to appear had to be properly timed to frame the entrance. The timing was successfully accomplished after many practices with the movement and video. The original video design had two moments where it faded into a solid color. However after several viewings, I no longer liked these moments, because the colors were becoming distorted when projected on the scrim. In order to fix the situation, I changed the video from a color fade into green to an arrangement of appearing and disappearing columns. The first column appeared framing the chair placed on stage. After all the columns reappeared, the last column to fill in and complete the image was the same column that first framed the chair. I used this effect to draw

the audience's attention to the importance of the chair. Another section started as a color fade into red. I decided to delete the color red and give the audience an opportunity to view other images. I altered the video to have still images appear slowly and in a layering format. The seven images fade in one by one and continue to layer leaving only pieces of the previous images to be seen. I felt the edits to the video design set up a more cohesive arrangement to complement the choreography. The video edits added moments for the audience's focus to be directed through space.

I learned how to direct the audience's attention through experimenting with the video design. I discovered how an artist has to make decisions about how to maneuver a viewer's focus through the material. An artist might make the choice to leave the audience's focus free to explore the environment, or one might create a direct intention for the audience's focus at all times. I attempted to create moments of direct attention either at the movement or video, while at other times letting the audience make personal choices about what to look at based on what they found interesting. Since the focus is shared between the movement and video, I found it hard to make final decisions about the video layout. I feel the end result was the best arrangement. However if I were to redo the project, I would apply the knowledge I learned in my class work throughout the school year to enhance the overall project.

I learned valuable skills in my classes, which I will be able to apply to future projects. The classes I took during spring quarter acclimated me to new vocabulary and video shooting techniques. I learned new skills to capture video footage in *Videodance* with Victoria Uris. Through the class work, I learned the how to adjust the camera settings to capture the highest quality of video. Now when I turn on a camera, I check the focus, white balance, and exposure. If I could change the project's video, I would apply these tools to make the video footage higher

quality. I also learned how to correctly approach incorporating technology with dance in *Media In Performance* with Norah Zuniga-Shaw. As a class, we explored integrating textures and digital doubles with movement. We also looked at scale, framing, and layering. I would want to spend more time investigating how I could incorporate these ideas if I were to do the project again.

A goal for the project was to challenge the audience's perception of dance performance. The combining of visual art forms sets up an environment, which is not typically expected when a person attends a dance concert. The purpose for the integration of the video was to complement the choreography, but also build an environment. I was inspired by the words of visual artist Robert Wilson when addressing his feelings toward viewing multimedia art:

Go like you would to a museum, like you would look at a painting. Appreciate the color of the apple, the line of the dress, the glow of the light... You just enjoy the scenery, the architectural arrangements in time and space, the music, the feelings they all evoke.

Listen to the pictures (From Wagner to Virtual Reality, Robert Wilson).

I like the mental picture Wilson paints in his words. When the audience viewed my project, I wanted them to have a total experience in the environment I created. I sculpted a world where the audience members could personalize the narrative to their lives and allow their minds to form a journey. The landscape of the project created the inspiration for the title of the piece.

The Memory Within became the title of the work in late April. As the performer of the movement, the narrative story line I established was to portray the image of a woman captivated by an internal memory. The character goes through a personal struggle to overcome the relationship that is metaphorically represented by a chair. The relationship could be thought of as a person, object, or idea. The title served as an introduction to my mind as the performer.

I presented Combining Forces at the Denman Undergraduate Research Forum. At the forum, I had the opportunity to talk with several people about my research. The public found the idea of combining dance and media to be intriguing and creative. The judges were interested in finding out how my project was relevant to my future as an artist. I explained to the judges my thoughts. By completing this project, I was more knowledgeable and skilled as a performer and designer. I could apply my successes and failures from this project to future endeavors. My internship at Broadway Dance Center allowed me to create new contacts in the professional dance world. It set up the opportunity to work with a professional choreographer, which was personally rewarding and satisfying. I could use Gauwloos' choreography as performance material when I audition for future dance jobs. The experience of creating a video treatment was challenging, but worthwhile. Through the process, I gained valuable skills as a videographer and learned the proper language to use when working in the field of media in performance. The judges were also interested in how the project applied to other work in the field of dance. I explained how I found the field of dance and technology to be intriguing, and how it had an interesting history with many fascinating visual artists.

In the course, *Media in Performance*, I became educated about the history of multimedia work. I found the work of visual artists Robert Wilson and Bill Viola to be compelling. I enjoy how Robert Wilson seeks to create the total experience for the audience. I appreciate his attention to details and his interest to evoke all five human senses. Bill Viola defined his work's central priority as the attempt to give other people "the possibility to experience things that I have experienced, revelations, in one way or another" (Zurbugg, 332). I like how he uses a simple and direct process and plays with the idea of compressing and expanding time. I enjoy Viola's view about how artists are represented in society. Viola stated, "Artists have a gift of

visualizing that many other people don't have, so part of what they're doing is providing not just a vision that is coherent with and connected to the rest of society, but visions that are underrepresented and not represented" (Zurbugg, 342). I found both artists to be interesting in different ways and appreciate their influence in the world of multimedia art.

I believe that one must go through many experiences in order to achieve ultimate success. Combining Forces allowed me to explore integrating media in performance in the areas that I found interesting as an artist. This was my first project uniting human movement and video projection. I had many successes and failures throughout the process, but overall was happy with the final outcome. I had the opportunity to work in a professional setting with choreographer Salim Gauwloos. The video connected concrete and abstract images, which allowed a character to be revealed through the movement. I felt the project was a successful exploration and mentally stimulating on many different levels. I learned from the trials and errors. As I continue to investigate dance through the field of media in performance, I will apply the discoveries I made from this project to future endeavors.

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